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Soviets put pincer on U.S. as 'main

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The Soviet espionage apparatus, including the KGB, GRU and East European services, is stepping up its activities on the North American continent, White House officials and members of the U.S. intelligence community report.

The prime target of this increased attention, they say, is the United States, which KGB training manuals have long termed their "main enemy."

The officials portray it as a "pincer movement" from Canada and Mexico. Because the United States maintains friendly rela-

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tions with both neighbors, and because both borders are largely porous, the task of containing and countering Soviet activity becomes that much more difficult, they say.

The increased Soviet threat is in terms of both quantity and quality: There has been a dramatic rise in the number of secret agents operating in all three countries as well as an increase in the sophistication of their personnel.

Soviet bloc agents are said to have become effective at pinpointing their targets of opportunity and concentrating their energies where it is deemed most useful.

U.S. intelligence and law enforcement

officials maintain that the United States is also getting better at tracking and countering Soviet bloc clandestine operations. But others question if the improvement is good enough.

"We have substantially enhanced our own capabilities against the threat," states Edward O'Malley, the FBI's director of intelligence. He terms countering Soviet espionage that agency's "top investigative priority."

But the problem "is very serious, and has been for some time," he adds. Attorney General Edwin Meese calls Soviet espionage "a major problem" and "a matter of great concern."

"We know that the number of Soviet agents in this country is massive, and severely strains our counterintelligence resources," he says.

This strain is evident foremost in the num-



bers game. The FBI estimates that there are some 4,000 Soviet bloc personnel in the United States alone. Between 30 and 35 percent of these — 1,200 to 1,400 — are full-time professional intelligence officials or

agents, the bureau reports. It is a number that has doubled in the past decade.

These include not only Soviets but East Europeans as well, including Czechoslovaks, Poles, Hungarians, East Germans and others. Augmenting the Warsaw Pact contingent are the Cubans who, increasingly, are called upon to do Soviet bidding.

To these numbers in America are added the 300 to 400 Soviet-bloc personnel in Canada and Mexico each. One-third of these are said to be involved in intelligence operations.

This total of some 1,600 full-time Soviet bloc espionage agents across the continent includes only those operating under the "cover" of being diplomats, journalists, trade officials or students, and "officially approved" by the host governments.

It does not count an additional unknown number of "illegals" —

estimated FBI and other counterintelligence agents by some 10 to 1. While the ratios are said to be better today, FBI officials will not reveal by how much.

Continent-wide the situation is even worse: Canada historically has been far less aggressive than the United States in countering Soviet espionage activities. The Trudeau regime expressed little interest in the matter, and the new Mulroney government is only beginning to get its security apparatus in order.

And Mexico for decades has turned a blind eye toward espionage of all stripes — as long as officials there felt it wasn't directed against them.

What is clear, however, are the targets of Soviet activity and the methods they use to go about it.

Interviews with dozens of Canadian, Mexican and U.S. sources, both in and out of official capacity, have revealed a broad picture of Soviet operations on the continent:

- Canada and Mexico are both used as staging grounds for operations against the United States. This is said to involve recruitment and handling of agents in relatively secure environments, far from the probing eyes of U.S. surveillance.

- Mexico, in the words of one former U.S. counterintelligence official, constitutes "a giant safehouse" for the Soviets. Agents and operatives from the states (never Soviet nationals) come and go with little risk of detection.

Information and documents, especially those purloined from high-tech industries in California's "Silicon Valley," can be dropped off.

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